

Knowledge Summary: Preparation and Prevention

Learning Together: Emergency Shelters and Substance Use Centres

March 2022



About Learning Together

The COVID-19 pandemic widened existing care and health gaps in emergency shelters and substance use centres. In February 2021, [Healthcare Excellence Canada](#), in collaboration with the [BC Patient Safety & Quality Council](#) and the [Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction](#), launched the [Learning Together: Emergency Shelters and Substance Use Centres Program](#) to share real-time learnings across these care settings. This was a response to an urgent need to quickly improve supports for underserved people and those who care for them.

Knowledge summaries

Emergency shelters and substance use centres have had to adapt to changing public health measures while still responding to multiple ongoing public health emergencies, including the housing and drug toxicity crises.

Recognizing the complex intersections between these emergencies, six promising practices were identified to guide pandemic response and preparedness and share 'lessons learned' across the sector.

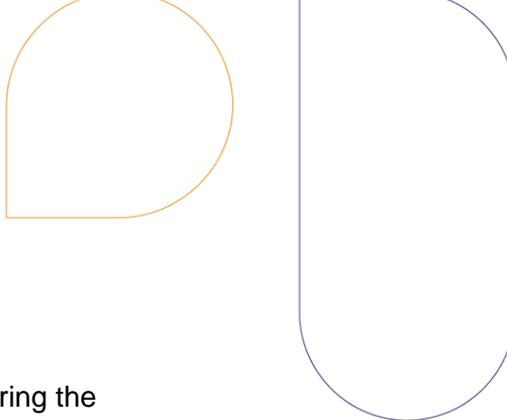
These promising practices are covered in a series of three knowledge summaries: people in the workforce, preparation and prevention, and plan for COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 care.

Preparation and Prevention

COVID-19 preparation and prevention were identified as two promising practices with several key areas for improvement.

Preparation

- Defining and implementing a comprehensive, clear and well-communicated plan for response.
- Co-designing responses for different outbreak scenarios with regional partners.
- Updating infection prevention and control (IPAC) protocols, education, training and compliance measures.
- Establishing a plan for communicating with regional/territorial/provincial public health authorities during a pandemic or outbreak.

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- Clearly stating and communicating leadership responsibilities during the outbreak/pandemic.
 - Clearly identifying mechanisms to inform staff, clients, visitors and care partners of emergency pandemic procedures and outbreak information points-of-contact within the facility.
 - Outlining a clear understanding of when an outbreak can be declared over.

Prevention

- Implementing standard procedures for screening and testing clients, staff, visitors, and care partners (including but not limited to procedures for when clients spend time outside of the facility).
- Ensuring procedures are in place around client mask use within the facility.
- Clearly outlining steps for facility response to a suspected or known case of COVID-19.

Knowledge you can use

Here are some approaches that people working in the sector (emergency shelters and substance use centres) found effective for COVID-19 preparation and prevention:

- Creating low-barrier opportunities for COVID-19 testing, including the use of saliva kit tests in shelter settings.
- Using trauma-informed approaches to address vaccine hesitancy by encouraging clients to ask questions about vaccination and acknowledging mistrust of healthcare systems.
- Building cultural safety into vaccination clinics by encouraging clients to seek support from on-site Elders if they are curious about vaccination and drawing on cultural practices to support clients who may be nervous during the vaccination process ([learn more](#)).
- Leveraging tools for ethical decision-making, such as the IDEA framework to guide staff through difficult decision-making ([learn more](#)).
- Co-creating models of information sharing and knowledge translation that fit the unique needs of those who use substances and/or are experiencing homelessness ([learn more](#)).

Webinars

For more information on COVID-19 preparation and prevention, check out these recordings and recaps of past Learning Together webinars.

COVID-Alert Risk Evaluation (CARE) Program shares details about the CARE program, which offers individual and shelter-level COVID-19 prevention and mitigation interventions, as well as immunization planning tools. Watch the webinar [here](#) or read the webinar summary [here](#).

Building Infrastructure for Harm Reduction highlights a 10-step plan intended to support substance use facilities, supportive housing and emergency shelters in their efforts to adopt effective harm reduction practices. Watch the webinar [here](#) or read the webinar summary [here](#).

A **Vaccination Discussion Forum** focuses on ethical considerations and challenges of vaccinations in shelters and substance use centres. Watch the webinar [here](#).

Serving Indigenous Youth showcases [Urban Native Youth Association](#)'s response to COVID-19, including practices such as culturally supported vaccine clinics for youth and using mobile/online services to support physical distancing. Watch the webinar [here](#) or read the webinar summary [here](#).

Reflections and Lessons Learned during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Perspectives from the Learning Together Program highlights lessons learned through the various stages of the pandemic from [Street Haven at the Crossroads](#) and [Projets Autochtones du Québec](#). Watch the webinar [here](#) or read the webinar summary [here](#).

More Resources

- [ICHA: COVID-Alert Risk Evaluation \(CARE\) Tool](#)
- [A Practice Brief: Infrastructure for Harm Reduction in Residential and Hotel Settings](#)

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